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Mass Media and the Digital Age: Paradigm Shift in Consumer Psychology

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Abstract:

The present digital age, with a highly 'media-ated' population, incurs the decoding of consumer psychology. The paradigm shift from print media to electronic and later digital/social media has been swift and ubiquitous. The implications of media-hold over society and the measure of the appeal of 'mass crafted discourse' (Norman Fairclough) upon the modern generation cannot be underrated. The history of media has passed over the ages of liberalisation, globalisation and now reached a point of glocalization where the netizen acquires a (g)loc/(b)al identity.

Keywords: *Digital Age, Consumer Psychology Social Media, Glocalisation.*

Media Studies are emerging as a highly potent field of research that encodes the psychology of the new generation. Audience research has taken up the analysis of the influence of this 'fourth wheel of democracy' upon the public. Conspicuous paradigm shift has taken place over the decades in the mode of consumership of the various mass media. Mass media came into public foray in the field of communication, during the last two centuries, making a deep influence upon society. In the field of interpersonal communication and in presenting entertainment to the public, mass media superseded over traditional means like letters and storytelling. The various means of communication that were introduced by technological advance one after the other were –the telegraph, telephone, radio, films, television and the internet. In the order of introduction, these seven mass media chronicled today are:

1. Print (books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines etc) from the late 15th century
2. Recordings (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDs DVDs) from the late 19th century
3. Cinema from about 1900
4. Radio from about 1910
5. Television from about 195
6. Internet from about 1990
7. Mobile phone from about 2000

The influence of these inventions upon the society has been wide and varied. Humanity went ahead in the field of communication by leaps and bounds, by means of all these media. But any new invention by man was initially resisted by the common public as a result of nature's inbuilt reaction against technology. This initial reluctance of the humans to

leave their comfort zones called homeostasis always comes to play with the introduction of each of these mass media or technological invention.

A detailed analysis of this aspect can be seen in John A. Bargh and Katelyn McKenna's essay, "Internet and Social Life." With the arrival of Samuel Morse's telegraph, people could learn of events from various parts of the world within hours or days and the Graham Bell's telephone increased regular contact between family members, friends and associates and there was an "effect of strengthening local ties" (5). The radio with its broadcasting capability reached millions at once and eliminated the factor of distance in disseminating news. But Bargh and McKenna report that there were reactions against all these inventions too. The Tsar Nicholas of Russia banned the telegraph as an "instrument of subversion," the telephone was labelled as breaking up old customs of visiting friends to catch up with them and as for radio, when Marconi got off the ship to demonstrate his new invention, the "customs officials smashed his prototype radio as soon as he crossed the border fearing that it would inspire violence and revolution (qtd in Bargh & McKenna 5). The television was also branded as lessening community involvement of the individual much the same as is spoken of about the internet today. But all these inventions came to stay with the public and is now hailed as major landmarks in the technological advancement of humanity.

Effect of Media on Society

A matter of grave import is the kind of effect that the media produce upon the public. Studies have proved that the media can make a great impact on social transitions as was in fact pointed out by the customs officials in Marconi's life. Earlier changes in society were wrought about by historical events, education and by the work of visionary social leaders. Today, these lessons or messages of change are brought about overtly and covertly through the mass media.

The changes in society by means of the modern media used today like the TV and the mobile phone are many and varied. The mass media is a means of socialising as well as one of communication. The messages spread through these media could take both positive and negative outlook. The gradual withdrawal of the individual to oneself and the lack of ties with the person sitting next to oneself is often cited as the bane of the new media technology.

Another matter of concern is the images presented through the mass media – be it print or digital—that evoke mass interest and excitement. The troll pages that incite laughter at social peccadilloes of corrupt, inept leaders are one side of the coin whereas the negative imagery of women where femininity is objectified is another aspect to be discussed. As early as the 1970s with the critic Betty Friedan, the American "happy housewife heroine" palmed off by the mass media came under criticism. Now, the effect of the mass media on the public is studied effectively by means of quantitative survey methods and content analysis (measured the frequency by which specific representations appear in the media) and also by means of Audience Research. These studies have pointed out that the media, like literature, affect the *truths* in society. For example, the set patterns in the media that create stereotypical models like 'politician' and 'woman' have been under study. Again the power of the media as agents

of habituation and socialization by which images on the screen/text is proclaimed to be factual, is also intimidating.

Gender Questions

The print media including newspapers have played a prominent role in disseminating information and direction to the reading public. General awareness on social issues and problems are reported and it is capable of raising the ideals and motivation in living. The National Council for Women's Education NCWE has used the mass media particularly the TV for generating public opinion in rural areas for girl children's wellbeing –such as education, family planning, sanitation etc. At the same time, the part of the media in generating gender roles has come under critical study. Content analysis of the various images of women in print and screen media has been done already. The Press Council of India has maintained some stringent rules regarding newstories such as report of rape, abduction and scandals relating to women whereby the name of the girl and their relations are to be withheld. Also the Press council states that news should not tarnish the reputation of females. Yet, anonymity is taking a backseat today with names and video coverage becoming part of TV and even social media images. The role of the media in reporting and sensationalizing news reports has also been attacked. This has been more so with the print media.

The images of women in advertisements both in print and on screen such as TV ads and more recently internet images have been under scrutiny. The mindless imitation of Western models in advertisements has led to the depiction of scantily clad women in ads and near nude pictures of females in films. The impact of these images on the young and children who watch the images on text/screen does not affect the producers who only wish to increase the rating in consumership. The catchword for the producers of advertisement is to catch male attention. Every product in the market is sold by means of depicting a pretty female with voluptuous curves, even if the product has no relation to a female. The sexual identity alone of the advert model is made use of, thus destabilizing her image and role in society. Women here are objects, not subjects of the 'gaze' and their bodies are eroticised for the pleasure of the male spectator. This points at a typically patriarchal and capitalist consumerist culture, which demands a lot to be rectified even in this age.

At present the most powerful media is that of the internet or the social media widely accessible through both laptops/desktops and mobile phones. The introduction of each massmedia was a technological improvement upon the former and has now reached the smartphone age where every aspect of day to day life is controlled by the 4G phones today.

Smartphones: Most Popular Media

The inclusion of the mobile phone into the category of mass media occurred as recently as in the year 2000. Since then media studies have converged on the possibilities of this mini-device popularly termed as the 'seventh mass media'. The significance of this media is blatantly obvious with its permeation into the day-to-day life of the public through knowledge and cultural processes. It is used not only as a tool for communication, but as a source of entertainment, information, calculations and creativity. It has become indispensable as explicated by the fact that everyone considers it as an inseparable part of themselves today.

According to a media expert, “mobile as the seventh media is as much superior to the internet as TV is to radio” (Deeper Insights). Mobile phone is fast becoming the most popular and all encompassing media, even though it is the youngest of the seven mass media. In fact, mobile is the first media that can do the function of each of the six previous mass media. Also, the mobile phone sports the significance of being the first personal mass media which is permanently carried by the owner. It has also the benefit of being always in the operative mode (unless when not desired).

Though both the internet and the mobile phone come under the term ‘digital media’, the new smartphones can handle both the internet and phone network connectivity. The major functions of the internet like interaction and search are available in the modern mobile phones. It capitalizes on social networking and digital communities. Focusing on its prime role as a communication facilitator, the mobile phone has a pride of place today in social networking. “Beyond the actual content of the calls and messages, this form of social interaction helps the sender and receiver to develop a common frame of reference and a shared experience. It is in this way that internal slang develops, news is communicated, caregiving and nurturing are performed, and courting takes place” (Ling 110). In this sense, the mobile phone emerges as the latest social network co-ordinator, the tool, by which the society ‘keeps rolling’. Consequently mobile phone as a media is establishing definite trends within society and its communication patterns.

Here too images on the screen are to be studied. The options in language, dictionaries and innumerable letters, symbols, pictures and icons open forth a vista of images popular with the younger generation of the day. Media studies resort to a number of methodologies to analyse the language employed. “Images are subjected to semiotic analysis and texts are analysed using content analysis and discourse analysis” (Studying Media).

At the same time one can find a creative spirit even in the language used in phone communication. This creativity can be tapped at the impulse of the moment, which is the speciality of the mobile phone. Since it is a media always found in the person of the user, whenever the creative urge seizes the individual he can translate it into words- it could be in the form of jokes, love symbols or even visual images. Facilities like the camera and video recording with attendant utilities like editing, convert the mobile phone into an extremely useful, and at times dangerous, media. The mobile phone that one carries has become nowadays the identifying icon of the tech-savvy young generation.

Mobile phone is an unquestionable representation of the shared thoughts and experiences of the network of individuals. Society today depends heavily on technology and the print and broadcast media has given way for the digital media.

Internet: The Medium of Communication

The smartphone begets its agency by means of its access to the World Wide Web. The internet, being the mode of communication of the youth of the day, requires careful study. It combines the facilities of immense broadband wavelength and the ability to cater simultaneously to millions of consumers. People today use it for self expression, group formation and for disseminating or gathering information. The relative anonymity offered by

it makes internet a unique field of communication which marks it as distinct from all other mass media.

The internet has been hailed as the magic of the digital age and though a relatively new invention, it has come to be accessed by almost the entire developed world and a considerable percentage of the citizens of developing countries today. It is teenagers and school children who are most conversant with its techniques, to the extent that the internet is as much part of their world as TV was to their parent generation. Its ability to harness a wide audience and to reach across the globe in seconds makes internet a miracle/cipher to the older generation. But it is fast becoming so ubiquitous that even the older generation has to learn its intricacies if they are not to be shelved in the fast pace of the contemporary world. The accessibility of the internet to rule public opinion form political ideologies and make or break business empires is dealt with in the book *The New Digital Age* by Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen.

Social Media

For the youth the internet used for surfing –for pleasure and for education --also has begun to open up the means to connectivity by means of the social media like Facebook, Google Plus and Whats App. Thus internet is an avenue for socialising and group formation based on similar interests. It is also used for making and maintaining relationships leading to a great enhancement of interpersonal connectivity. The option of anonymity offered by the internet chat rooms and newsgroups has been looked at with scepticism by media critics. Initial studies on the effect of internet on personal relationships such as those conducted by Nie and Erbing (2001) concluded that internet led to increase in depression and loneliness among its users though later studies have proved otherwise.

A case in point is the instance of three teenaged girls in a Government Higher Secondary School in Kerala committing suicide together over no particular immediate issue. It was found that they were using mobile phones without parental knowledge and the newspapers reported that they spent a significant amount of time on social media: “content of their Facebook chat history revealed that they were depressed over disappointments, love affairs and inferiority complex” (Ramdas “Cops Solve Mystery”).

The option of anonymity of this virtual world can be used for negative purpose too. The traps used by stalkers, porn users and cyber criminals which is the result of this feature of the internet is often critiqued in the print media. But on the other hand, the lack of the need to inscribe the personal features like skin colour, gender and appearance on first rendezvous through the net cause many to be uninhibited and able to record their real self online. According to Bargh and McKenna, “people are better able to express their ‘true’ selves-- those self-aspects they...were usually unable to present in public—to their partner over the internet than when face to face”(11).

A later study on the effect of internet on interpersonal relationship showed that though in the initial stages there was a withdrawal and depression (the first two years of net use), there was a change in the negative effect and a positive psychological outcome was recorded in individual and interpersonal harmony. In fact this study reported that those who use the

internet for keeping track and to keep in touch of contacts, also spent more time in face to face communication (Kraut et al 192).

Another positive feature is the availability of newsgroups where people of similar interest can hangout, as well as blogs and websites that can be created by any who wish to cater to the public. Internet also provides online support for people who are stigmatized by the mainstream society like the LGBT and women who dare to question stereotypes. On the flip side, hate campaigns are also part of the World Wide Web and even militant and terrorist groups infiltrate their agenda by means of the internet.

We find that social networks are now the arena where social issues are reported, supported/castigated, groups are formed and propaganda is circulated. Many become instant celebrities by means of Youtube, Facebook and Whats App. The likes and comments celebrities get on Facebook and the followers in Linked in and Twitter make fans association a matter of the past. New stars are born such as the 11 year old Jayalakshmi from Pallipuram, Kerala whose song was recorded on social media, which led to her being traced by Zee TV into national acclaim. (The videos of the girls song had gone viral on What'sApp).

At the same time, social media is also very much alive to crimes against women as well as environmental issues—two glaring social problems of Indian society today. The Delhi Nirbhaya rape case and the Kerala Dalit girl Jisha being raped and killed was taken up by the social media. The online news on Jisha murder ran thus:

Kochi: As soon as the autopsy report of law student Jisha of Perumbavur, who was raped and murdered, came out, the social media rallied behind the victim seeking justice for her. Jisha's murder became a hot topic of discussion on Facebook. Close to 13,000 discussed the issue online and more than 1,000 posted comments about her murder. Several Facebook pages were created seeking justice (Raj "Kerala Rape Case").

Youth and Contemporary Media

It would be worthwhile to focus on the impact of the media upon the youth of the current generation.

Social Networks:

Social networking is currently the most favoured pastime of the teenagers and college students. Popular surveys show that girls are more hooked to social networksthan gents. According to the survey made by Madden and Zickur in 2011, social networking sites were popular among young women between18-29 and 69% of them use these sites daily. In Europe and North America, 54% of those aged between16-24 had social network profiles but as the age increased the percentage went lower (Zheng 2008). An interesting survey of the social networking habits of the teenagers in Kerala was done by Titto Varghese. According to this work, social networking is the most preferred activity online though browsing for educational need comes a close second for girls in high school. The newspaper and the radio is fast disappearing from the life of the teenagers. They use social networks "for finding friends, keeping in touch with existing friends, and to share their thought"(629). He also

recorded that girls primarily use their laptops and boys use mobile phones to access the internet.

The youth of the present generation are turning from the TV to the internet for entertainment too. If the older generation, switched on the TV to watch movies to while away time, now the 'gen next' download games to do so.

Films:

The catering of the mass media for popular appeal has always been under criticism. The content of films had been critiqued for their depiction of sex and violence. Feminist analysis of movie content has been pungent in their comments. In *Women and Social Change*, it is recorded: "they follow the base motive of the lower type of American movies with inartistic plots, vulgar dances and songs and dialogues in a disgusting tone. Even the titles of films are objectionable and the posters which advertise them are improper and vulgar"(qtd 295). The central Board of Film Censorship is supposed to review and edit objectionable scenes which might adversely affect children and the youth, but not much of censoring is done today in this aspect in order to protect the interest of the producers of the film. According to a survey made on the effect of sex and nudity in art, 36.6 % women regarded it objectionable, 38.4% as indecent; 34.5% college girls regarded it unobjectionable and 25.8% girls found it aesthetically satisfying (297). This survey shows the changing outlook of the different generations about exposure to sexuality on TV and computer.

Pornography:

The form of sex and violence becoming popular particularly among the boys of the age is pornography. Pornographic content in videos range from erotica and violent as well as non-violent sexualised scenes. Generally pornography is taken to refer to explicit portrayal of human sexual activity in print and screen media. Pornography is the sexually explicit subordination of women by presenting them "as sexual objects for domination, conquest, violation, exploitation, possession or use or through postures or positions of servility or submission or display" (City County Ordinance 35). This kind of repeated exposure makes the audience (males) consider violence against females trivial and may even consider it pleasurable leading to an increase in social malcontents which is evident from the gender crimes committed today in India.

The increasing trend among college students to engage in watching porn-powdered video clips is definitely one of the reasons behind much of the sexual crimes conducted today. According to the study made by Zillmann and Bryant, long term exposure to such depictions created the following results:

1. They became more tolerant of violent forms of pornography
2. Less supportive of statements about sexual equality
3. Became more lenient in assigning punishment to a rapist whose crime is described in a newspaper account (132).

It has also been noted that people inured to violence on screen merely remain as onlookers when such scenes occurs in real life – as we see in Whats App videos recorded and spread online. Today when a gruesome act is seen on the street, there are many to record it on the mobile camera and no one to go forward to the rescue of the victim.

Conclusion

The modern times termed the ‘digital age’ by many is making technology the buzzword through which communication, transactions and even entertainment are brought to one’s fingertips. As all the previous media merge into one common device, like the internet installed TV and Smartphones, the contemporary generation is living in a highly mediated sepulchrum. In ancient times people lived ‘locally’ and in the times of liberalisation, they lived ‘globally’: now is the age of glocalisation where local events go global and global events are local news. The citizen of the digital age is very much of glo(c)/(b)al identity.

In the postmodern world of mediated images and networks, the multiple voices that comes through various channels like the mass media—text, image, recordings—clamour for the discretion of the spectator /viewer and also calls for a capacity to relate with ones fellow beings in a gender/race/age neutral empathy. The power of the media in forming and directing public opinion and even identity cannot be minimised. This is a juncture or hiatus where modernity—socially/individually — is moulded through the agency of media consumption.

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